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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0711  
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/03/2033  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [MCAP](#) [CO](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: RAUL REYES DEATH: CONFLICT DOES NOT APPEAR  
IMMINENT AS CHAVEZ ESCALATES RHETORIC AND "MOBILIZES" FORCES

Classified By: Robert Downes, Political Counselor,  
for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (S/NF) Summary: Notwithstanding President Chavez' order that ten battalions be dispatched to the Colombian border in the wake of the March 1 killing of FARC's second-in command Raul Reyes, DAO reports only a minor increase in activity at two relevant BRV bases in two states west of Caracas and no unusual movements of troops thus far. (Note: Since his first efforts to release the FARC hostages, Chavez has worked to improve the image of the FARC. End Note.) Chavez' warning to Colombian President Uribe not to undertake a similar operation along the Venezuelan/Colombian border implicitly recognizes that some FARC terrorists cross into Venezuela. Despite all of Chavez' bluster, the Venezuelan people and more importantly, its military, appear puzzled and concerned over Chavez' hostility toward Colombia as well as by this latest escalation. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The March 1 Colombian military operation that killed the FARC's second-in-command Luis Edgard Devia Silva, AKA "Raul Reyes", and other FARC terrorists set off a furious BRV response during the March 1-2 weekend. Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro read a March 1 communiqué lamenting the death of Raul Reyes, calling it a "severe blow" for the humanitarian release process in Colombia. He argued that it also "revealed the stubborn behavior of those who favor the military option." Maduro called Reyes' death a "slap in the

face for those of us who have placed our hopes for peace and for the best efforts to foment understanding as the formula to achieve reconciliation, reunion, and harmony among the people of Colombia." Maduro asserted that only hours before the BRV had received international support for President ChavezQ, idea of forming an international contact group to facilitate further humanitarian releases. The Foreign Minister reiterated the BRVQ,s willingness to continue working for a solution to "this conflict that seriously affects the stability, sovereignty, and security of the countries of the region."

13. (SBU) The night of March 1, during a lengthy television appearance defending the BRV's efforts to combat crime, Chavez specifically warned Colombian President Uribe not to undertake a similar military mission across the Colombian/Venezuelan border, implicitly acknowledging that the FARC cross into Venezuela. During his March 2 "Alo, Presidente" television broadcast, Chavez called the killing of Reyes a "cowardly assassination." He eulogized Reyes as a "good revolutionary" and that "it feels as if my right arm has been torn off". The BRV ordered all domestic media to observe a moment of silence for Reyes on March 2. Chavez called Colombian President Uribe "a liar, Mafioso, a right-wing paramilitary running a narco-government subordinate to George W. Bush." Chavez added that it was "necessary to liberate Colombia from the imperialism of the United States".

14. (S/NF) During the same "Alo, Presidente" broadcast, Chavez ordered his defense minister to move 10 battalions, plus tanks, to the Colombian border immediately and to put the air force on alert. Defense Minister Rangel Briceno publicly acknowledged the order from the audience. Since that time, DAO reports only minor increases in activity at two military bases in states west of Caracas that might suggest preparations for mobilization and no unusual movements of troops so far. (Comment: It is doubtful that the Venezuelan Military has the logistical capacity to mobilize an estimated 5000-6000 troops and equipment quickly considering their lack of logistical equipment and the nation's highway system. End Comment) Furthermore, despite purchasing state-of-the-art fighters and attack helicopters, most local observers believe they are not yet combat ready. Chavez also ordered FM Maduro to "close" the Venezuelan Embassy in Bogota. Venezuelan diplomats started returning to Caracas as early as the night of March 2. The Colombian embassy in Caracas told Poloff March 3 that their operations were normal, although the Colombian ambassador planned to fly to Bogota the same day. Chavez also announced that he would boycott the upcoming UNASER Summit meeting to be held in Colombia.

15. (SBU) Chavez and other senior BRV officials are attempting to frame the BRV's dispute with Colombia as a dispute with the United States. During a special March 2 airing of the political program "La Hojilla" BRV propagandist Mario Silva held up a map of Colombia showing some 12 radar site claiming that each was staffed with "35 U.S. special forces." Silva

asserted that another "1000 - 3000 Green Beret were currently in Colombia" training and advising the Colombian Army on an invasion of Venezuela.

16. (C) Comment. The BRVQ,s initial reaction was framed in terms of how ReyesQ, death would undermine efforts to secure the release of other FARC hostages. Chavez, however, framed his subsequent decisions to order troops to the Colombian border and close the BRV Embassy in Bogota in much broader Q) and aggressive -- terms of defending the sovereignty of Latin American countries against Q&American imperialism.Q8 Given that ReyesQ, death occurred along the Ecuadorian/Colombian border, the BRVQ,s current dispute with the Colombia is entirely of its own making. Anecdotally, Venezuelans appear puzzled by mixed signals from their government. BRV mouthpiece daily VEA, for example, gave the Colombia story as second billing, headlining instead Chavez' approval of a national police law. The mobilization order ran on page two. ChavezQ, supporters at the March 2 Q&Alo, PresidenteQ8

broadcast in Caracas and the United Socialist Party of  
Venezuela (PSUV) closing congress in Zulia reflexively  
applauded ChavezQ, bellicose statements, but we perceive much  
greater caution and concern among most Venezuelans.  
DUDDY

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